



# News Release

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## NATIONAL "ARSON AWARENESS WEEK", MAY 2-8, 2004

### **Theme for 2004 - "Juvenile Firesetting: The Preventable Arson"**

**Baton Rouge** -- Governor Kathleen Blanco and Louisiana State Fire Marshal V. J. Bella announced today that the week of May 2-8, 2004 has been proclaimed National Arson Awareness Week. The theme for 2004 is "Juvenile Firesetting: The Preventable Arson."

Each year, billions of dollars worth of property is destroyed and hundreds of people are killed due to arson. For the eighth straight year, statistics show that juvenile firesetters account for at least half of those arrested for arson. Close to one-third of those arrested are under the age of 15.

National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) statistics show that children experimenting with fire started 41,900 reported fires, causing an estimated 165 civilian deaths, 1,900 injuries, and \$272 million in direct property damage. This is the reason that the theme of National Arson Awareness Week, 2004, addresses juvenile firesetting and attempts to raise America's consciousness of this serious national problem. Children often set fires because they are curious, infatuated with fire, mischievous, or wanting attention. Children who start fires may be children in crisis, with the fires acting as cries for help from stressful life experiences or abuse.

But youth firesetting and juvenile arson ARE preventable fires. If you suspect a child is setting fires, notify the proper authorities. It may not be "just a phase" that they are going through; it may be an indication of a much deeper problem. If you know or suspect that an arson crime has been or is about to be committed, contact your local fire or police department, or the Arson Division of the Office of the State Fire Marshal at 1-800-256-5452. Fire Marshal Bella also urges that you report all suspicious activity near houses and buildings to the local police, and support Neighborhood Watch programs.

**\*\*\* MORE MORE MORE \*\*\***

**OTHER STEPS THAT CAN BE TAKEN TO REDUCE THE FIRE SETTING  
OPPORTUNITY INCLUDE:**

- Keep leaves, firewood, overgrown brush and shrubbery and other combustibles away from buildings. Most arson fires are started outdoors. Don't make it easy for an arsonist to start a fire or easy for an outdoor fire to spread to a building.
- Keep matches and lighters out of reach and out of sight of young children. In addition to juvenile arson, fire play by children too young to know what they're doing causes hundreds of deaths and hundreds of millions of dollars of loss each year.
- Keep doors and windows locked when a building is unoccupied, BUT don't use double cylinder locks, bars without quick release mechanisms, or other security provisions that could trap a person in a building with a deadly fire.
- Board up or demolish vacant buildings that are eyesores to your community --- they serve as an easy target for arson.
- Finally, if you suspect a child is intentionally setting fires or unduly fascinated with fire, get help immediately. Your local fire department, school, or community counseling agency can put you in touch with experts trained to help in these matters.

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